Using ethnocentric dialogic education to develop the autonomy of children in Africa: A Kenyan study

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Abstract

Dialogue can be an excellent weapon for justice and liberation, which 'silenced' groups could use to challenge the status quo and authenticate their efficacy. Over the years, there has been a preconceived negative focus on Africans which has suppressed African children's autonomy. Consequently, there is a need to liberate the position of children in Africa through illuminating their reality, by paving the way for their emancipation, through the use of pedagogical spaces. Impartiality can only happen when these children are actively engaged in their world. The process needs to start from having interactive classrooms by incorporating dialogic approaches.

Using a study in Kenya, I explored the reality and complexity of childhoods in Africa which has not been investigated before. I used observations of 10-12-year-old students in their classrooms learning, within their school environment and also within their community. I also interviewed five teachers exploring how dialogic practice could be applied.

It was evident that most of the students (children) in Kenya have active and vibrant childhood experiences in their social-cultural lives. However, they engage passively in their classroom learning, where

their voices are silent. The silencing scars their engagements in the formal settings, positioning them into passive positions, even when they are misrepresented and overlooked. Thus, if African education embraces dialogic engagement, then, students will be equipped with skills to emancipate themselves and their identity. The exercise also could salvage these students' participation locally and globally. Although pedagogical reform is critical, further dialogues with key players are necessary.

Keywords: *African Childhoods, Dialogue, Spaces, Autonomy, Ethnocentric.*

Introduction

In this paper, I lay out the context and then demonstrate the reality and complexity of African childhoods by projecting the Kenyan students' phenomena. Through the use of four pedagogical 'spaces', I discuss how students in Kenya could engage actively in their learning in preparation for participation in local fields and global platforms. I further discuss how cultural practices and values could be included in African education to meet students learning needs. In this article, I take the stance by Corrado and Robertson (2019) that there is no distinctive 'African child' or African childhood experience. Children from the continent of Africa come from diverse backgrounds with varying experiences which were evident in this study. The recurring 'single and negative' narrative about Africa and its' people is unreal. Still, there are lessons from Kenya on education development, that could inform other countries in Africa.

Kenya is located in East Africa, with a population of about 52 million people, according to the World Population Review (2019). The government of Kenya since 2001 has aimed at providing Free Primary Education (FPE) to its children

(the Republic of Kenya, 2008). The mandate was formulated through the government policy on free education to attain Vision 2030, and also to meet the rights of children according to the United Nations Children Rights Convection (1989) and the African charter (1990). Kenya is a signatory of both (UNCRC and African Charter). As a result, the government of Kenya made initiatives in their system to meet the needs of students. Some of the initiatives include making policies that safeguard the students as well as policies that aim at raising standards of education which are accessible to all children (Republic of Kenya, 2005,2008, 2015). Although the government's goals have been progressive, there are gaps of inequality that could be addressed, which are discussed in this paper (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology 2014, 2018).

Overall, in Kenya, about 9.9 Million children are accessing primary education, which is composed of 51% boys and 48% girls. There are 21,718 public schools and 7,742 private schools. Kenya has a total of 127 teacher training colleges, 24 are government-funded, while 101 are private, and 2 are diploma colleges (UNICEF. 2014; Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2014). According to several studies (Ackers and Hardman, 2012; UWEZO, 2012; Njoya, 2017), education in Kenya remains authoritarian where voices of children are unheard. The suppression has an impact on the children who end up silenced in the formal set-up. The experiences of children in Kenya are very similar to other African contexts. Thus, they can benefit from lessons in this study, especially promoting the autonomy of African children in formal settings such as in education, politics, and economy.

As a writer, reflecting at my own experiences growing up in central Kenya, my childhood was quite active and happy. My family, like other middle-class families, met all my needs. I was surrounded by friends and engaged in many pleasant activities with children of the same age. During weekends and holiday

times, we would happily help our parents in the homes picking coffee and feeding animals. On Sunday, we went to Sunday school where we took part in different roles such as singing, reciting memory verses, acting in concerts, among other activities. We also engaged in other community events and activities such as weddings and engagement parties where we would eat, play, and sing alongside adults and other children. Today in Africa, there are many young children with similar kinds of vibrant childhoods that I remember. Unfortunately, these rich experiences are not accounted for when discussing children in Africa. There are predominant negative projections of childhoods in Africa, which affect the identity of these children. Additionally, these biased projections hinder these children from participating actively in forums such as in political, economic, and education spheres globally (Corrado and Robertson, 2019).

There are numerous instances when Africans have been overlooked or presented as helpless. Although, the reality is different since most Africans have potential, ability, support, and opportunities. Wainaina (2005), a renown Kenyan scholar outlined when writing about Africa, one needs to write about 'doom and gloom,' for the global audience to connect with the story. For instance, in the quote below Wainaina contends that when an author is writing about Africa, they need to use words like '*darkness,' 'Safari' and 'show thin people who are starving'* to make the story look more African. This negative projection is not only visible while discussing the continent, or the adults, but it is also evident when discussing the children. In many instances, children in Africa are publicised as homeless, starving, abused, sick, or dying (Diop, 2014; Corrado and Robertson, 2019).

Wainaina (2005) states; '*Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari' in your title. {..} In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and*

dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving…'

Here, Wainaina captures how African discourses and images in the global arena are projected. These negative projections are unreal and a humiliation for the Africans, they need to be confronted. I, therefore, argue that the silencing of African children in education has subdued their autonomy to critique the latter both at local and global platforms (Corrado and Robertson, 2019). Even in education, there are times when children in Africa are narrowly presented, or overlooked either in education research, in childhood studies and also while exploring superior pedagogical practices. Over the years, most universal childhood policies and education studies have been dominated by western ethnocentric perspectives and experiences (Twum-Danso and Ame, 2012; Schweisfurth, 2013). As a result, these dominations have created room for a predisposed understanding of other childhoods which are different from western experiences. For instance, when international agencies are drawing global guidelines for children, or when they are discussing childhoods across the continents. However, without insiders' perspectives from the continent of Africa to alleviate vibrant cultural and social understanding, the children in Africa are 'silenced' and misrepresented.

The misrepresentation could lead to children in Africa acquiring a 'victim identity,' inhibiting their autonomy. A good example is the quote below by Borkett (2018), who states that *'children across the developing world are not as privileged as children growing up in the UK.'* The quote goes on to name Africa, without explaining that Africa is a continent of 54 countries with diverse communities of varied economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. The childhoods across these diverse communities and countries in Africa should not be condensed into one category of 'underprivileged' childhoods. As the

Wainaina (2005) quote above pinpointed, writers discuss Africa as if it was one country, which is evident in Borkett (2008) quote where Africa is named amongst countries. Furthermore, the so-called 'privilege' is a nuance, since it could be an economic privilege, or social, cultural privilege, or intellectual privilege. One cannot claim to have measured overall situation by looking at a few negative case studies in a few African countries and then use them to represent the rest of the continent. Nonetheless, such narrow projections about Africa tend to be accepted by the global audience (Wainaina, 2005; Diop, 2014). Borkett, 2018, '*Children across the developing world are not as privileged as children growing up in the UK, as they do not have access to the range of services available here. In places like India, Bangladesh, Africa, and Somalia, children still spend much of their time working and bringing essential money into families' (*p.79).

African education (including Kenyan) has positioned their students in passive positions through continuous use of authoritarian methods of teaching and learning, which were a predisposition of former colonial practices. For instance, the education system in Kenya has been reported by educators and researchers to be using teacher-centered methods of teaching, which positions students in a passive position (Ackers and Hardman, 2012; Benoite, 2013). The use of teacher-centered methods disadvantages these students since they learn to engage passively in formal settings. Furthermore, students are not equipped with skills that would help them become more confident to express their ideas creatively and imaginatively. Since these formal education practices in the majority of African countries were predisposed from former colonial education systems. These kinds of education systems were Eurocentric and alienated African cultural values and practices (Said, 1993; Maathai, 2009; Njoya, 2017). Such systems were disorientating to the Africans (Adeyemi and Adenyika, 1992). They do not meet the learning needs of the students. Thus, as Nyerere

argued, there is requisite for an education that meets African students' needs (Kassam, 1995; Ibbott, 2015) -- an education that is relevant culturally, economically, and politically.

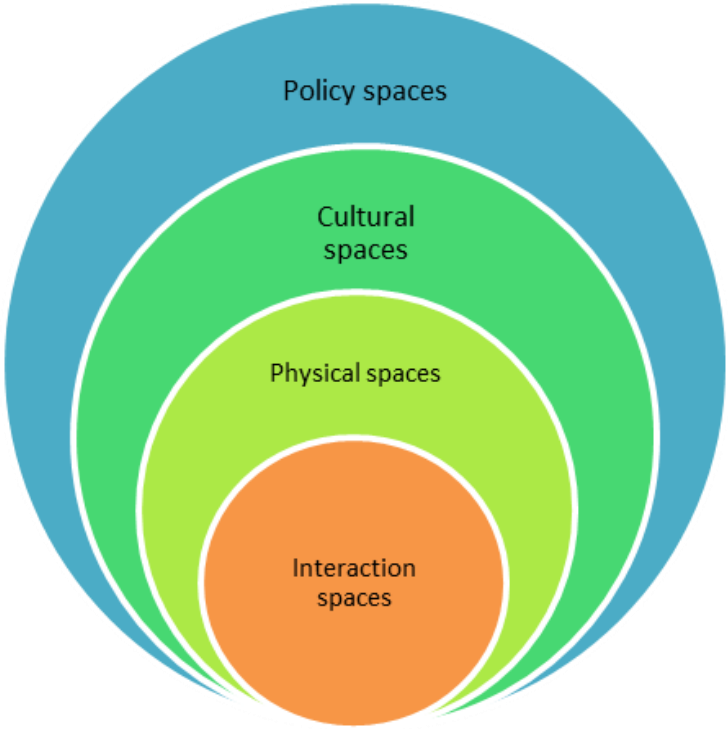

Figure 1.1: Pedagogical Spaces (Corrado, 2019)

The importance of using dialogic practice in African education is important to equip students in their classroom learning with skills that prepare them for their world. I use four pedagogical spaces (figure 1.1 above) as the lenses that assisted me in exploring how dialogic approaches could be possible in Kenya. These pedagogical spaces are the possibilities where dialogic pedagogies could emerge, and sometimes, they control the choice of methods of interactions. The first spaces are the interaction spaces, which involve the character of dialogue applied when teachers and students engage in exploratory talk. In the interaction spaces, students and teachers can convey knowledge from their life experiences. Second, are the physical spaces which include the quality of infrastructure and resources that would enable or hinder the application of dialogic approaches in learning. Third are the cultural spaces that shape the experiences, values, and

practices of teachers, students, parents, and society. Fourth are the policy spaces, which consist of education policies that are steered by the law of Kenya, government agendas, context needs, and global organisations activity.

Autonomy in this study refers to having an enabling learning environment where students can engage freely and creatively. In these spheres' students can question issues, they can problem-solve, innovate and even redefine their identities, goals, and input. The students can embrace their cultural values and practices in their learning. This study was ethnographic research which used the Kenyan students' context to create an understanding of the background of children in Africa. The study starts to counteract local and global hegemonies which oppress the autonomy of children in Africa. At the same time, show how the incorporation of dialogue could be used to advance learning and promote autonomy. The move could allow students to have equal participation in learning and local or global forums.

Literature

In this section, I deliberate three major literature standpoints. First, I discuss the importance of having an education that is critical and culturally relevant. In the second standpoint I deliberate dialogic pedagogies and their relevance in the African context. The final viewpoint, I discuss how constructivist theory is relevant in Kenyan education and other contexts in Africa.

Today, most students in Kenya are limited to exploring their full potential in education (Njoya, 2017). They are inhibited from using their cultural tools such as the use of local languages and deriving cultural experiences in their classrooms (Thiong' o, 1986; Ngugi, 2018) and their learning lacks critical thinking and creativity. As Njoya (2017) argues, the Kenyan students' potential is limited by the exam-based system, where grades determine students' worth in

the job market. The education system becomes a process for workers/labourers, but not thinkers since there are no spaces for students to be imaginative, critical, nor creative. The system has remained authoritarian and there is perhaps no use of dialogic pedagogies in teaching and learning. Moreover, cultural knowledge and experiences have been locked out since the introduction of formal education. Consequently, there is a need to re-examine practices in Kenya, for example, the incorporation of critical and cultural pedagogies.

In the post-colonial Tanzania, Julius Nyerere (1968) tried to promote African social-cultural ideologies in his country with the aim of liberation, cultural inclusion, and development. Nyerere was a pan-Africanist, an educator and the first president of Tanzania after the country gained independence from Britain in 1961. During Nyerere's presidency, he made ‘the Arusha Declaration’ (1974) with the aim of political, economic and education change to promote emancipation of his people from dependence and inequality. He encouraged development and equality through African socialism called 'Ujamaa.' The meaning of 'Ujamaa' is familyhood. Through 'Ujamaa,' ideology, the rural communities were guided to work together in the farms and produce agricultural products to feed their families as well as earn money. The income was meant to be divided amongst the people to promote equality and eradicate poverty and inequality (Smith, 1998).

In education, Nyerere advocated for education of self-reliance, where students were to learn skills that would equip them for their rural life involvement in the Ujamaa villages initiatives (Ibbott, 2014). Nyerere challenged the emphasis on the importance of exams where primary education is more about passing exams to pursue higher learning and eventually have a 'white-collar job' (Kassam, 1995). He argued that primary education should be a holistic approach, where it is more student-centered, addressing both formal and informal skills. Learning

should enhance an individual's confidence and co-operation while developing a critical and inquiry mindset within students. It would inspire, challenge, and equip individuals to take responsible actions for their life development. Their cultural values and lifestyles would be preserved and also engaged in education (Kassam, 1995; Sifuna, 2007; Ibbott, 2014). Nyerere advocated for learning that is beneficial to students from rural communities who live in agricultural contexts where some end up working in the agriculture sector or start small businesses. This phenomenon is very similar to other countries in Africa (including Kenya), where a large population lives in rural areas. These populations need an education that relates to their lives and which equips them to advance their immediate opportunities and potential. Regrettably, formal education seems to focus on academic subjects (such as Science, Mathematics, and English), neglecting subjects like agriculture, business education, and home economics. Thus, Nyerere's advocacy for culturally inclusive education is relevant to learning needs in Africa today.

The inclusion of local languages in learning could also make education more culturally relevant to the students. For example, in the Kenyan context, the local languages are only taught in the early years but they are made irrelevant in the main education system. But these languages are used in daily social settings including in rural areas in general workplaces such as in the broadcasting industry. However, majority of students are not prepared for a formal engagement in these local languages, since they are not omitted in their formal learning (from upper primary school level). As Said (1993) argued, language is more than words but embodies culture practices and philosophies. Therefore, exclusion of when African languages in formal education alienates the cultural heritage and daily traditions of African students. It could demotivate students, as they may perceive classroom learning to be alien to their outside lives.

On the other hand, students may think that their culture is informal and not relevant for formal engagement. Thiong'o (1986) argues that African students should first learn their local languages and then add foreign languages to demonstrate liberation and sovereignty. He explains that learners who first learn other languages and then add knowledge of local languages have a colonial mentality. It sums up the case for the majority of students in Kenya. Thus, it is critical to review the inclusivity of cultural tools in learning, such as the use of local languages. It would encourage learners to engage actively, equipping them with additional skills. At the same time, learners thinking would be liberated impacting their daily choices and practices. Diop (2014) has argued that when Africans use foreign languages to think and express themselves, although they can communicate to a broader global audience, there is a dilution of distinctiveness. This dilution is because the mould of expression in African languages and the meanings are lost while translating into other languages. As Said (1993) contended, language is not just words but a carrier of cultural meanings and philosophies. Thus, as Diop argues, the use of foreign language desalinates African cultural meanings and expressions. Still, some systems of education in Africa, such as Kenya and Senegal reprimand students from using local languages in their learning (Diop, 2014; Ngugi 2018).

Dialogic pedagogies in this study refer to the use of exploratory talk when exploring knowledge, where students and teachers can engage in innovative ways. Exploratory talk is highly recommended for the effective application of dialogic pedagogy (Mercer, 2000). This is the kind of talk that may be applicable in the Kenyan classrooms, but it might need training and immense practice. The use of the collaborative thinking approach would help students to problem solve and be critical and creative in their learning. From Alexander's (2008) and Mercer et.al. 's (2013) assertions, the use of dialogic pedagogies in classroom learning has been seen as valuable since students can engage actively.

By using dialogic platforms, students start to contribute to knowledge, and they also question issues that relate to them (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This kind of engagement prepare students beyond their classroom education. For this study, I worked with teachers to identify the feasibility of these pedagogies' application in the Kenyan setting. From my position, dialogic practice is profoundly rooted in the African social-cultural lifestyles and should be adopted in the school learning to increase classroom engagement. Indeed, when classroom interactions are planned in a way that students can relate to the topic and are encouraged to participate, they will feel valued. Active participation might motivate students to get involved in their learning. Moreover, they would be able to use their outside experiences in their class and vice versa (Freire and Macedo, 1993; Ibbott, 2014). The progress in pedagogical practice would aid in advancing students learning in the Kenyan classrooms and further equip them with life skills.

Drawing from Freire's (1970) views, silenced humans can use dialogue to liberate themselves from any oppression, but only if they develop critical consciousness. His views were drawn from the experiences of oppression by the colonial regime, where he argues that people can use talk to challenge their oppressor and to liberate themselves. In his argument, humanisation of the oppressed could only come through overcoming fear and individuals pursuing transformation relentlessly through action (Freire and Macedo, 1993). Freire's analysis acknowledges that class, race, and gender influence how individuals view themselves and how others perceive them. Hence, negotiating the process of liberation requires resilience and co-operation with others. The negotiation needs dialogue among the oppressed to enhance unity, and then together, they could challenge the oppressor (Freire and Macedo, 2012). This kind of liberation is needed within the Kenyan classrooms and beyond. Such can be achieved through the inclusion of cultural tools and practices in day to day

classroom practices and other educational 'spaces'. Consequently, the use of pedagogic 'spaces' can be a valuable platform for liberation, which the Kenyan teachers and students can utilise.

In the African context (including Kenya), the 'silenced' groups can use dialogue to communicate their positions and break the persistent social, cultural, economic, and historical shackles. Students in Kenya are relatively silenced in their learning when the practice remains more teacher-centered. Their liberation can be done by reviewing the pedagogies and allowing more dialogue in the classroom. This incorporation could enhance critical thinking and maybe aid emancipation from local and global hegemonic oppression. Additionally, other silenced groups within the Kenyan education are the teachers, who seem to have less autonomy in their practice in an exam-based system. They may be liberated if dialogic approaches in classroom practice are incorporated.

Looking at the constructivist theory, according to Vygotsky, during collaborations a zone of proximal development (ZPD) is achieved. The zone of proximal development is when a child's knowledge is maximised while actively interacting with a more experienced individual (Vygotsky,1978; Garton, 2004). The child's extension of knowledge is raised to a higher level through the collaboration, which helps the individual to attain more. When the relationship is asymmetrical for example, between a teacher and students, or between a parent and children, the older and more knowledgeable person will guide and oversee the task through more explicit scaffolding (Garton, 2004). Similar to other parts of the world, the above is applicable in the African social-cultural context where children engage in collaborations with peers and with adults. As they undertake various tasks at home and even within their community, they learn from more knowledgeable others (MKO), which help these children to advance in their knowledge and skills. Drawing from the Vygotskian notion,

these practices support children to reach the zone of proximal development when there is collaborative engagement. Indeed, Africans historically passed on knowledge and skills to the younger generation through practical participation and also through dialogue and talks. These learning practices exist in informal learning for more youthful people at home and even during community involvements. These exposures could incorporate social learning through the use of social-cultural tools available in the contexts. It would, therefore, be vital with the adoption of these kinds of practices in formal settings (schools).

Notably, most African contexts are reasonably similar; hence learning from one another on pedagogical reforms is helpful. The social-historical and economic backgrounds and tensions are identical in most settings. Thus, Kenya can learn a lot from these countries and vice versa. Mazrui (1986) argues that the continent of Africa is a product of triple heritage. The continent has been influenced largely by the historical events from the pre-colonial to today, the post-colonial era. The triple heritages come from a mixture of African indigenous cultural heritage, the Asian involvement, and the effect of Europeans' presence from the 15th century to the 20th century. Formal education was a product of this heritage and haunted Africa's history of cultural fusion (Iliffe, 1995; Mazrui, 1986; Deegan, 2009). However, this heritage should be positively incorporated in education to help students value their backgrounds and enhance self-esteem. Moreover, when cultural backgrounds are reflected and fused in formal settings, learning will become more interesting for students and teachers, since it would relate to their lives. The alienation of their culture will be eradicated, making learning and education practices more ethnocentric.

Methodology

In this study, I explored teaching and learning in schools in Kenya. I applied ethnographic approaches through observing teachers in their classrooms for five weeks, in search of understanding their practice through their activity and

interpretations. I also observed students as they engaged in their classroom learning and community activities (church) as well. Two schools (Baraka and Elimu) and a community church (Maendeleo) in central Kenya were involved in my data collection. In Elimu school, I conducted observations for comparative purposes, since it was more resourced and had parents from middle income. In Maendeleo church, I obtained photographic evidence that demonstrated how children were involved in their community outside of school. However, I spent most of my time in Baraka school, where I conducted classroom observations, interviewed teachers, and conducted a focus group. Baraka school had parents from the low social-economic background and was under-resourced at the time of my observations. During data collection, I took time to reflect on my experiences. In areas where I needed clarity, I had additional informal discussions with teachers. The reflexivity, the open discussions, and the use of photos helped me to supersede bias.

Three methods of data collection were chosen -- namely observations (classroom and community), teachers' interviews, and a focus group. During my observations, I wrote detailed field notes and took photos to support my evidence. The permission to take the photos was granted by the gatekeepers. In my interviews with the teachers, I audio recorded our discussions. Five teachers engaged in my observations, interviews, and focus groups; however, other teachers engaged in casual talks with me in the staffroom. Baraka and Elimu teachers had been professionally trained and had diverse teaching experiences in Kenya, which they used to inform my study. All the names of participants, schools, and church were anonymised for confidentiality. In this study, all ethical guidelines were followed and approved by the University ethics committee board. Nonetheless, cultural sensitivity was applied while collecting data.

For analysis, I first coded all the transcripts in numbers and colour codes and then identified emerging themes from the three data collection methods (observations, interviews, and focus group). After that, I matched all the emerging themes into associate classes/categories of main themes. The use of three methods in data collection provided rich data that revealed fascinating insights from the perspectives of teachers. The photos offered real visual evidence to my discussions. As Pink (2014) argues that when ethnographers use visual images, they represent a range of factors such as the context culture and personal experiences at the time and reflections, among others.

Discussion

In this section, I discuss specific themes that emerged from the data related to Kenyan students, society, and education practices in the context. In my discussions, I examine these themes to my conceptualisation four spaces (see figure 1.1).

Use of languages

Provision of education resources is a significant way of supporting learning and empowering students. From my observations, there was a disparity in the availability of resources amongst schools, which imparted teaching practice. The funding of infrastructure and resources in Kenya is the responsibility of the government since the introduction of free primary education. But from the photos (Ai and Aii) below, it is evident that though both schools were rural and public schools, there were differences in resourcing. These differences were apparent despite the governments intending to provide equal education for all students. The teachers in the study clarified that the discrepancy was due to the social-economic backgrounds of the students. Photo (Aii) below is Elimu school library which is fully equipped with books, while Baraka school had no library.

The differences in resources eventually impact the learning experiences of students, as discussed further in the section.

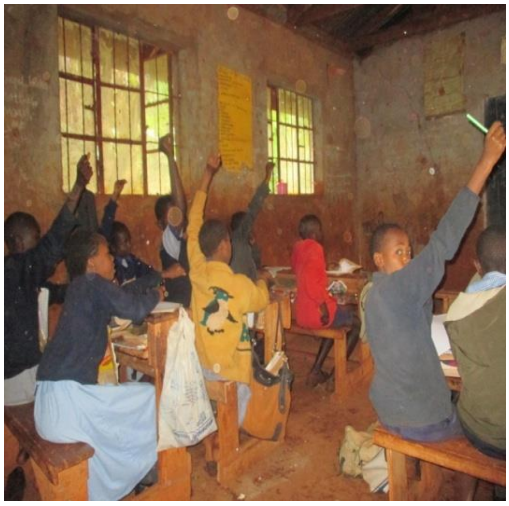

Photo A i: Baraka Students in their classroom

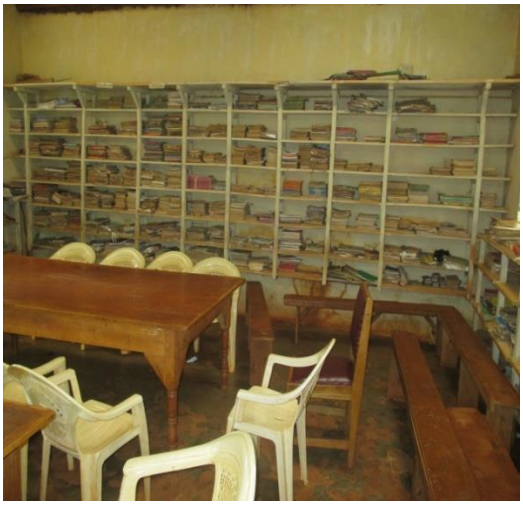

Photo A ii: Elimu school library

All students in Kenya accessing government sponsored schools use the same syllabus. It is important to acknowledge that in Kenya, the curriculum is structured by the KICD (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development) which is a branch of the Ministry of Education. The syllabus is given to all schools, providing guidelines on how and what to cover in school learning. Teachers disseminate teaching of the syllabus in the best way possible, in order to facilitate the learning and empower students for their lives. As teacher Mike notes with pride in Extract 1 below, when teaching practices and syllabus content are compared between Tanzania and Kenya, the students in Kenya are prepared for global participation through use of English. This claim by teacher Mike (Extract 1 below) seem to echo Diop's (2014) assertion that foreign languages prepare students for bigger audiences across the globe.

Extract 1:

> **Mike**-*But I must say, Kenyan teaching is one of the best because we teach well and actually the mode of language we use, actually English has helped Kenyan children to go far. I give this example when I compare with our neighbouring country Tanzania, I have my friends who work in Tanzania and they normally say that because of their language because they normally use Kiswahili, they say the kind of teaching there is not well complexed. It is not well advance like the Kenyan one. Even the curriculum and syllabus of Kenyan is actually one of best, although we are doing some amendments or some changes in the curriculum. So the strength in the Kenyan teaching is that, it is good and we are working hard, and if only the government can remunerate and pay teachers well. **(***Interview 4***)**

In Extract 1 above, Mike asserts that the teachers are proud of their own work by being able to complete the syllabus as they help their students pass exams and cover different aspects such as foreign languages like English, which then enables the students to communicate internationally. Subsequently, a close analysis of the data suggests that in the interactive learning spaces, the students are empowered for their own learning and also for local and international participation through languages. This empowerment, however, seems structured from the policy space during curriculum development according to Mike's assertions above, and then executed in the space for interactions during teaching and learning engagement. Nevertheless, it is the emphasis on foreign languages (such as English) which are seen as formal, which undermines the use of local languages in classroom learning.

During my observations, the languages of instructions were predominately English and Kiswahili which were the official teaching languages as Mike stated in Extract 1. However, the majority of students came from backgrounds where they speak other languages such as mother tongues. In Baraka and Elimu schools, the mother tongue is predominately Gikuyu language which is highly

spoken in the community setting for example in the church, or at home with their families. However, the Gikuyu language was less used in schools and it was perceived as interference to academic language by the teachers. At times, Gikuyu was used by the teachers to emphasise on points and to foster better understanding. Largely, during my classroom observations the teachers used English language for instructions and only used Kiswahili and Gikuyu to emphasis on learning points. Still, teacher Pius (Extract 2 below) noted that the students in Baraka schools were not fluent in English due to lack of practice at home, hence they were not confident. The poor language skills could at times hinder their participation as reported by the teachers in our discussions. From my interview discussions, Pius felt that students in private schools were more confident in engagement (Extract 2 below) and fluent in language use, since they came from family backgrounds that easily used both Kiswahili and English. Teacher Mike (Extract 1) also felt that use of these academic languages (English and Kiswahili) better prepared the students for future.

Extract 2:

> **Pius**- *it is a change and I am still trying to adapt. Because in private children are well prepared from the beginning {.....}because in private they are very strict on what you are teaching, because it is a kind of business. So they have to be very strictked on what they are giving out. {...} so the children are fluent in English and they can do a lot even from the lower classes. Even class one and two you can explain something in English and they can understand. But when I joined here, it is a big challenge. {.....} because of most of them are still using mother tongue so when they come to school, English become like a foreign language to them.* (Interview 3)

Nevertheless, the use of local languages enhances the students' engagement and understanding as reported by UNESCO (2015), since students use familiar languages in learning. As a result, they are more confident in participating

within their classrooms, since they are using a language that they are fluent in, therefore they can express their views extensively. Moreover, the use of familiar language has the potential to appraise students' ethnic identities and self-esteem. Drawing from Thiong'o (1986) views, conversing in African local languages should be promoted since it makes individuals feel grounded to their roots, and it also liberates learners to study other additional languages such as English, German, Hindu and Ibo, among others. Thiong'o argues that learning of other languages first, before one's own ethnic language, is a kind of mental enslavement. He suggests that African languages should be advanced in schools and not repressed (Ngugi, 2018), which resembles the situation in Kenyan schools. From this insight, maybe the students from the Baraka school should be encouraged to use the languages which they are more fluent in, such as the ones they use at home (Gikuyu), and in addition to learn other languages. This may make them more confident in their classroom participation and uphold their learning and their ethnic identity. Undoubtedly, teachers might find the using of local languages in classroom learning more appealing for their students in the rural schools such as Baraka. Then, teachers might stop comparing interaction spaces between private and public schools, since engagement would be equally positive, and possibly more dialogic. Consequently, Freire's (1995) decree on the use of dialogue to liberate the oppressed, the students in Kenya could use their home languages to emancipate themselves from colonial mentality and practice. They could as well liberate themselves from passive ways of learning, through active participation in their interaction spaces by using local languages in classroom dialogue.

When teachers' attitude towards local languages is from a constructive point of view, then they may stop comparing their students in public schools to those in private schools who seem fluent in English and Kiswahili. Perhaps, they would be able to promote all languages in their schools indiscriminately. The use of

multiple languages is an advantage that can be promoted, since it may break the social barriers that seem to influence classroom engagement. Additionally, research has revealed that multilingualism helps in brain development, multitasking, problem-solving and in integration. Individuals who use multiple languages are able to be more understanding of others and have good social skills (Kovac and Mehler, 2009; New York times, 2012; Berk, 2013). There is also occupational advantage for those who advance in using multiple languages, progressing to professions such as broadcasting, language interpreters, or working for international corporations. Additionally, research has revealed that bilingual and multilingual individuals have a 5-year delay in getting Alzheimer's disease (Bialsky, 2001). Therefore, instead of reprimanding the use of ethnic languages in these Kenyan schools, maybe they should be encouraged. The use of the official languages could also advance concurrently. As a result, this would help to change the perceptions towards rural students as those restricted by their ethnic languages, and start perceiving them as knowledgeable individuals of multiple languages.

Unfortunately, there were visible and invisible class rules (Bernstein, 2003) that place some students at a disadvantage for lack of fluency in English, due to them being in public schools as well as coming from a lower social class. The knowledge of teachers about the backgrounds of their students could possibly shape how they engage them. As noted earlier if teachers could perceive students use of other languages as an additional advantage, they might be able to promote their confidence in learning through practicing foreign languages like English and Kiswahili which are vital for their academic exams as well as local languages. The visible and invisible rules (Bernstein, 2003) are deeply connected to the family background matters. However, Alexander (2010) and Mercer (2010) have argued that through cooperative learning and dialogue students can improve their language skills. Nevertheless, Alexander (2008) and

Mercer (2010) did not address multilingual practice as a way of developing cooperative learning and dialogue, even though their work took place in the United Kingdom where there are many students whose home languages are not English. Their work focused on the use of English, which may seem to inadvertently promote language hierarchies. Nonetheless, as teacher Pius noted (Extract 2) the use of English language has its benefits especially when encouraged in daily conversations -- students improve their fluency in the language. This competence in language skills is a fundamental key to learning (DFES. 2006), so these skills need to be promoted in classroom engagement, as one of the teachers noted.

Pedagogical practice

From my classroom and school observations, students always smiled at me and appeared enthusiastic while answering questions posed by their teachers. Still, they appeared to have boundaries when engaging with adults, for example with their teachers and with visitors like me, they waited for the adults to initiate conversations and then they could respond. For example, in Extract 2 below, teacher Kim asks the questions while the students respond. This mode of communication is evident throughout the Extracts in most of my observations. Additionally, the students attended their classes on time and always promptly followed the instructions given to them by their teachers. Conferring from Foucault's claim on power dynamics (Taylor, 2014), discipline is vital in institutional organisations, for example in these schools. The students in this study knew their timetables and their responsibilities and they appeared to follow them well. When the bell rang, they prepared for the next action. This was evident throughout my stay in both Baraka school and Elimu School, there were no differences on how the students behaved. Indeed, some of teachers' participating argued that in learning, discipline is vital since schools are formal institutions.

Some teachers argued that the use of dialogic pedagogies could hinder formality discipline which in this case students in these schools in Kenya had learnt to play their obedient roles. As I observed, students always responded to teachers' instigations and not the other way around. Although the classroom set-up could be viewed as old-style (Photo Aii), it appeared to work for them as they had visible and defined roles, which designated their outcomes (Bernstein, 2003). These roles empowered students to fit in a formal system where they were able to follow structure and order. They were able to relate to others with friendliness and respect. One may argue that they were constrained from initiating engagement for example, the students were never observed asking questions, or having debates on complex issues in the classrooms. Some teachers even noted that their classroom structure hindered application of dialogic pedagogies and from our discussions there was fear of challenging power dynamics. Consequently, the students participated in IRF (Initiate, Respond, Feedback) swiftly in their lessons as directed by their teachers, which are evident in the Extracts below (Extract 3, & Photo Ai).

Extract 3;

- *'Recap on sound energy, last week we did an experiment'* **Kim said***;* **students** *'yes'*
- *Today we will cover heat energy'* **teacher;** *'Heat energy'* **class repeated.**
- *'State of matter?'* **teacher asked; students gives answers** *i.e. 'gas', 'liquid', 'solid'.*
- **Kim,** *'what are good conductors and bad conductors';* **One student** *'good conductors allow heat pass through them'.(Observations from a Science Lesson-; Topic- Energy)*

Photo B: Baraka Students engaging in Science experiments

From my classrooms observations the teachers planned topics, and then invited students into questions and answers participation. Sometimes, the students could answer together, or they could raise their hands, and when the teachers' named them, they answered. Like in Extract during a science lesson, teacher Kim asks the students *'what are bad and good conductors of heat?'* and one students raise his/her hand and answers *'good conductors allow heat to pass through them*'. At times, students were invited to participate in solving problems on the board, or to complete tasks for instance in science experiments (Photo B) above. In Photo B the students volunteer in taking part in mixing of solution to test their solubility. They are participating in the tasks and they appeared exultant to do so, hence their attitude towards engagement in their learning is positive. The teachers did not need to motivate them, thus they perhaps displayed self-determination or compliance. Either way the lessons progressed smoothly, without disruptions. The students were also given feedback on their work, as the teachers gave them tasks.

During feedback, the teachers could also assist those who were struggling. For example, in key areas such as handwriting, grammar and organisation skills. This gave the students time to have face to face (1:1) time with the teachers during the lessons. Teachers tried to promote understanding by involving the

students in their learning through questions and answers and also through experiments which was evident in Extract 3 above. Even so, these activities and questions were directed by the teachers as distinguished above.

Referring to the theory of active learning, Robinson (2001) argues that when students are actively involved in their learning, they tend to remember much more than when they passively listen. During my interviews some teachers denied using lecture method and they felt that the students were actively engaged in their learning. The denial is problematic since it can be a hindrance to developing actual dialogic engagement. It also became an ethical issue and a methodological concern, as I was no longer sure whose version of classroom practice I should be documenting and examining; mine or theirs? Possibly, the denial takes place because of teachers' awareness that dialogue should be happening. It is through triangulation processes that I am able to shed light to these dilemmas. During the interviews and focus group discussions, some teachers admitted that much could be done when further questioned about pedagogies choices. I am then able to understand the complexities between what they say they do, and what I witness them doing. For example, teacher Mike noted that teachers forget to use appropriate methods so that they can complete the syllabus quickly and prepare their students for exams (Extract 4 Below). The pressure to achieve excellent exam results is also real in their lives. Nonetheless, the initiations of engagement are always from the teachers, and not the other way around.

Extract 4:

> **Mike**- *I think us as teachers we tend to forget the most appropriate methods to trail the point home, but we normally take the easiest, the shortest that will normally help finish the syllabus quickly. And most of us use teacher-centred method which are actually not usually good. (Focus Group)*

Students self-determination

In Baraka school, the self-determination of the students was at times evident in their classroom demeanour as observed in Extract 4 during the science lesson. They volunteered in answering questions and in taking part in the experiment tasks. Another good example during my stay in Baraka school was when there were upcoming athletics competitions amongst the neighbouring schools and the students needed to prepare. One day whilst sitting in the staffroom having tea with all the teachers, the teaching staff were surprised to see their students running and practising for the events, using their own initiatives. They took responsibilities for their input and they were able to organise themselves without guidance from their teachers, such actions displayed the self-determination of the students (Photo C below). But this demonstration of students taking control was observable outside of classroom learning without the teachers, which indicates that the hierarchical order in the interaction spaces in classrooms do hinder the determination of students. However, when these students are on their own, they are able to exercise control of their physical and interaction spaces, amongst themselves like in this athletics preparation.

Photo C Baraka Students running in their playground

Additionally, there were factors that controlled their self-determination, for example, in the field event mentioned above (in photo C), students' activities were challenged by lack of proper equipment such as javelin, discus and shotput stone. Although the resources they had were inadequate, students were resourceful and used their own initiatives. Similarly, in the case of getting involved in classroom experiments like in the previously discussed (Photo B), the teacher also noted they had limited resources which disadvantaged their lesson planning. The lack of resources shaped the teaching methods applied in the classrooms, and also dictated student engagement. This is also evident in the Extract 5 below, where Teacher Pius deliberates that when resources are rare their work is harder. He notes that there are some schools in the country with leaking roofs, poor floor surfaces and not enough desks. The inadequacy in the physical spaces led to poor classroom engagement in the interaction spaces, since there are restraints in resources. Pius argues that the students' independence and privacy is restrained when uncomfortable numbers have to share the same resources such as books and desks.

Extract 5:

> **Pius**- *In other places like here the classes are not that bad, the population is not big so it is every easy to contain then them, again some classroom needs some restructuring, some of them if it rains the roof is leak, the floor is not okay, the desks because the floor is not smooth write the desk moves, and they share a desk, one of them three, so if one of them move and the other one is writing they make mistakes. {....}, so there is trouble. If they had, if they could afford a locker a desk per person it could be easier and they can even have that privacy. {...}so when they are doing the work like that it is easier for them to cheat. Because they are just next to one another. they are squeezed so, one can just peep to what one is doing and copy what the other one is doing instead of thinking. {..} So that one is pulling them down.* (Interview 3).

On the other hand, my interviews suggested that sometimes the teachers were under pressure to complete the syllabus in time, which in turn limited classroom engagement. According to one of the teachers, for him to complete the syllabus he had to skip areas that involved active student engagement, hence controlling the students actions. It was interesting to note that what was overlooked in learning to complete syllabus was student engagement, whilst Alexander (2010) and Mercer (2010) have advocated the significance of student engagement in their learning. Nevertheless, in Extract 5 above, Pius states that in some of the schools in Kenya, the population of the students is quite high leading to strain on good use of the resources available. These issues in physical spaces impacted on the pedagogies applied in the classrooms and at times, they seemed to limit the students' autonomy in learning. However, the students continually looked keen to get involved in the available platforms such as outdoor areas in the field. Kenya is one of the signatories of global children rights protector as a member of UNCRC (1989) and also a member of African Union that signs to African Charter (1990) that protects children's rights. These memberships signify the country's outlook towards upholding the welfare of their children. Understanding how these children are protected is vital. In the last few years, as Kenya has engaged in the global field by being a member of these significant bodies, policies have changed as a result. Indeed, Kenya has redefined the guidelines for children's rights alongside specifications by UNCRC, African Charter and Law society of Kenya. All children have right to live, right to have basic needs and to have good care from their parents and safety, health care and education from the government which aligns with the African charter (Organisation of African Unity, 1990; Republic of Kenya, 2008). The new guidelines have impacted education policy spaces and also interaction spaces within classrooms. As the teacher Gathenya stated in (Extract 6) below, there has been a policy for all children in Kenya to have access to a '*free and quality education'* which confirms that the government have taken initiatives in the

policy spaces to improve education, first by making education free for all and secondly by trying to improve standards.

Extract 6:

> **Gathenya-** *Like the right of children free education, the quality of what the child is getting is what we should be dealing with. The opportunity is there and everybody should take the child for that free education, and if you are found not doing the same the law will take its place. {...}*
> **Pius-** *I think the rights are well observed, and with all what my colleagues are saying here, there is not much left, {....} yeah, because the children knows their rights, it is being taught in classes and were are also training them to use them. If anybody is going against their rights, we are trying to help them talk it out. {....}*
> **Kim**- *Maybe the only disconnect is the children rights versus culture! Because sometimes culture steps on children's' rights, because these are referred to as African children, and we have rights that are not there. Or if they were there, in the cultural set up, children didn't have as much rights as they have today. So, our mind set is coming from the culture, so culturally we have rights for children, now constitutionally today we have rights for children which are not naturally intertwined. So, there must be, there will be some friction at some end, because this is what is demanded for you as per constitution but culture demand something else {..}*
> **Kuria**- *But the community sometimes, as my colleague was saying, I thought he shed light with that, with the issue of FGM, it now interferes with the children rights, and it is done by the community. The other day I saw, on the screen-TV, some cultures have made some children not to go to school because it is time for circumcision.* (Focus group)

Teacher Pius (Extract 6 above) agrees with Gathenya on the improvements, noting that most of the student' needs were being met through these government initiatives in policy spaces and by provision of more resources in the physical spaces. This was evident during my observations that almost all children were well dressed, had access to food, shelter, clothing, health care and also

education. From 2001, all children in Kenya to have free accessible education and it is against the law for any child not to go to school (Wanjohi, 2011). From my observations in the community, there were no children out of school during school times and students were well-kept, which photo E below. Their facial expressions and body posture appeared happy, healthy and positively involved. The evidence contradicts the global rhetoric concerning the African children being hungry and deprived with no access to social amenities (Cohen, 1994; Kilbride, 2010; Cheney, 2011; Harber, 2002, 2014).

In many cases in Kenya, children are highly involved in social events and from my observations in the church context, it was very evident that the children engaged collaboratively with adults and peers. These children were made to feel as part of the society and they were allowed to actively participate in events. For instance, I observed children singing songs to the church congregation, also reading in prayers and reading the bible. After engaging in these performances, the adults praised them by clapping hands and by giving constructive feedback. Their engagement in the events helped them feel valued. Moreover, this community involvement (like in the photo E below- where children were singing alongside their parents), were likely to improve these children's social skills and build their confidence in reading, public speaking and in collaborative presentations. Some children collaborated with their peers, while others collaborated with the adults in singing, reciting poems and saying biblical memory verses. The efficacy and esteem of these young children was enhanced (Zimmerman and Clearly, 2006; Dweck, 2012). They also demonstrated self-determination as they took part in these events. Most of the skills being modelled in these experiences are vital for life, whether in education, social or career life. The society appeared to engage their children actively in these events -- by drawing from Bandura (1977), this is a great example of social learning. Moreover, there is acquiring of knowledge and skills that are vital for

classroom learning and also for future life. In addition, some of these platforms provide physical resources that are not available in schools. For example, children could learn specific skills such as playing piano, using audio/public speaking equipment and using other musical instruments among others. Thus, involvements in these community events provide support for spaces for interaction where children attain social, cognitive and practical skills. In terms of physical spaces, these platforms provide access to resources which are not available in the schools.

Photo E: Children presenting a song with their parents in church

Giddens (1979) argues that children who participate actively are agents within a context (Embrahim, 2011) since they are taking an active part in the structure system. His argument is visible in the Kenyan arena where the children are taking part in community events, although this may not be much appreciated. As the children grow up in Kenya, they take active roles in the community similar to the church event in the photo above (Photo E). These community events are learning spaces, and they should be acknowledged in formal education. They foster creativity and problem-solving skills, which are essential in the education sphere and beyond (Robison, 2001). Unfortunately, in most cases, these skills go unnoticed by the schools where students are mostly

passively engaged. From my classroom observations, I observed students discussing their outside activities.

Moreover, when young people in Kenya are job hunting, they can overlook these practical skills in their curriculum vitae. These skills are devalued in their formal education. But, they are vital skills that they acquire at home while helping their parents' with housework, in farm work, or in businesses that should not be ignored. When contextualising any education system, it is crucial to value society's way of life and reverence their strengths. From this study, I advocate for the inclusion of these practical skills in classroom learning, where students and teachers can draw knowledge from these encounters. These practices were acceptable within these communities, so they should not be undermined in the schools.

Nyerere suggests that education should be relevant to the context, to provide skills that the children will use in their environment (Sifuna, 2009; Ibbott, 2014). Education should not be limited to school, but include the community and home life experiences and knowledge in learning, for example, during exploratory discussions. Dialogues in the classroom should engage outside in life experiences of the students, but they need to be structured in the curriculum to support dialogic practice in the classrooms. This will make learning more relevant and perhaps even exciting for the children. They might be able to be more creative within their classroom learning because they might draw on all their life experiences. Their active input might even challenge the negative dominating outlook for African childhoods (Wyness, 2006; Maathai, 2009; Diop, 2014) and give the real constructs for these children (Twum-Danso, 2013) and improve their learning engagement.

However, there were contested spaces within policies and spaces of interaction regarding some changes that have been adopted in the education system. Teacher Kuria reported in Extract 6, to have watched a documentary on television where a community in Kenya forced their female children to undergo genital mutilation. The parents insist on FGM, and when individuals violate this practice, they can be ex-communicated from their community. The stance causes a conflict with the government's agenda on free education for all. As argued earlier, dialogue can be applied in contested spaces to establish a balance, where students and parents communicate on their wishes on new government policies and vice versa. The open dialogue on views will help all feel included and not left out. There should be interactions on some of these contested spaces. Twum-Danso (2013 p.1) contended that '*childhood studies should move beyond simple dichotomies and seek to understand complexities around children lives'*. Her argument on how rights for children in Africa can sometimes be narrowly defined from a global 'birds-eye' view. The lack of in-depth African cultural understanding and respect for the societies' views can lead to misunderstanding of these children and their context, causing tension. These tensions between local and global policy were evident in Kenya in regard to some changes in education policies as discussed above.

Effects of parental involvement

The roles of parents were discussed by teachers. For example, Kim pointed out that parents who took their children to private schools provided better social and economic support, unlike some parents who took their children to public schools (Extract 7, below). The purchasing power of the upper and middle class was advantageous to their children, while the children from the poor class home were disadvantaged in schools. Since their parents could not add extra money to the government's schools funding as teacher Gathenya admits in Extract 7 below. From my discussions, it appeared that the responsibility of resourcing

was put on families by the teachers. Instead of government who had aimed to provide equal and adequate resources for all students.

Extract7:

> **Kim**-*Private schools are better because of the nature of the kids; the parents are motivated; that's why most of them are willing to pay an extra coin to take kids to those schools, but in public schools most parents do not value education as much. So, you that in term of teaching, the class in private school becomes easier as opposed to public schools. Butagain in private schools you work under a lot of pressure and very little pay, very little pay.....and hence the parent should automatically chip-in. Now, unfortunately parents are not willing to chip in because they were made to understand that education should be free*. (Interview 1)
>
> **R**-*okay, and how can we empower not just those one but all students to engage in their learning more?*
>
> **Kuria**- *eeh , through what, eeh through providing learning materials. Like now parents are talked to in meetings and they are told good books they can buy for children as supplementary. {....} so it could be through parents buying supplementary materials, and teachers giving plenty of homework, assignments.* (Interview 2)
>
> **Gathenya-***I believe, it is only here, but where I come from parents have accepted that there is no free education, and they go back to their pocket. The government may, whatever the government does the parents come in, they ship in and the school there are performing well. You find where there are exercise books, but you find some parents believe the government is giving books and that is a wrong perception. Yes they are giving books but it might not be enough. So if the parents can accept this and ship-in they will help the child.* (Interview 5)

The perceptions of teachers on parental responsibilities were a predisposition of the knowledge that most of the public schools in Kenya were built through parents and communities coming together in Harambee fundraising. Then, the government offered teachers and curriculum. The collective funding of schools demonstrated that society wanted to see their

children educated. However, to support this society vision, the government of Kenya committed itself from 2001 to provide free primary education for all children throughout the country.

As a result, it took over the entire funding for schools. But according to Gathenya in Extract 7 above, some parents took a back seat, by expecting the government to provide everything for their children's education. This interpretation was especially taken by parents from the lower social class, as mentioned by the teachers in the interviews. Even though the FPE initiative was successful, it was never without challenges that warranted parental involvement. Some of the challenges were caused by the high enrolment of schools, leading to bigger numbers of students in the classrooms, thus needing more resources and infrastructures. As a result, the funding for the extra resources in these schools remained scanty despite the government's determination. Therefore, parental involvement in equipping schools became imperative to deal with the difference, as discussed in the Extract 7 by the teachers.

Gathenya (Extract 7 above) noted that some parents in Baraka school were aware of FPE and were unwilling to pay any additional costs. Consequently, there have been lower standards of teaching due to under-resourcing and poor upgrade of infrastructure in some schools. Unfortunately, this is most evident in schools with parents from a lower social class. As the teachers noted, private schools were better equipped and had better teaching standards. The public schools in good economic background as well had more resources and infrastructures (Extract 7). In areas where parents can afford to pay extra and are willing to do so, the schools are better equipped. At the same time, most parents favour to take their children to well-funded schools; hence, the under-resourced schools are deserted by the wealthy, informed parents.

From my observations at Elimu school, the students were from middle-class families. Elimu had more resources and had two class streams with about 30-40 students per class, while Baraka school had one stream with about 16-20 students per class. The enrolment differences were due to social and economic status of the parents. The reduction in enrolment in schools like Baraka further disadvantaged these poorly funded schools. This was because the government ration of teachers to students made them provide less money to schools with lower enrolment. These issues were alike in other similar poor schools. Therefore, the parental social-economic backgrounds and their attitudes toward educations support affected the resources available in the school and also impacted the methods of teaching in those settings. From my interviews, it was obvious that when teachers had fewer resources, they were not motivated to implement diverse methods of teaching. Thus, funding better resources were essential for classroom practices and perhaps there is a need for parents, teachers and government to discuss on these funding issues.

Teachers noted that parents needed to supplement school resources to fill in the government funding gaps for resourcing 'physical spaces' to support better 'interactions spaces'. According to teachers, when they have adequate resources such as books, desks, and sciences kits, they could involve students more in their classroom learning. The support of physical spaces is not just an issue in Kenya, but it is an essential role for parents to get involved. In the UK, according to the DCSF (2008) report, parents who are actively engaged in their children's lives at home and school have a positive impact on their children's education. Indeed, parents should first provide basic needs for the children to be healthy, safe, and alert enough to be able to participate better in schools. Besides, they need to support their children in getting to school and providing school aids such as books and pens, among others. It is important also to create a learning home environment to stimulate their children intellectually.

Furthermore, forming a secure parental bond and providing a stable home is fundamental for great physical, moral and psychological sustenance, enabling the child to have decent participation in their classroom (Vygotsky, 1978; Berk, 2014). These are universal vital needs for all children drawing from Maslow's theory, including those in Kenyan schools. Indeed, the later was noted by the teachers in their discussions where most needs have been met, but remains a challenge for the few individuals from lower social-economic backgrounds.

Some cultural aspects can affect parental involvement, such as parents' cultural beliefs, practices and expectations. Majority of communities' in Kenya value education, and they are motivated to take part in their children in school learning, by supporting them to do their best. Nonetheless, a few parents have distinct cultural values, and they might not be as engaged as expected. As teacher Kuria said in Extract 6, some communities in Kenya, especially the nomadic, value tradition practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM). Hence, these parents can disengage their children from school to get involved in such rituals. Although the government is trying to deal with such issues by promoting children rights to education, among other rights, these issues remain problematic. As a result, such cultural practices in these communities can be an occasional hindrance to parental involvements.

The social-economic backgrounds of parents are significant to their awareness and involvement in their children's learning. Kenya has diverse communities from varied social-economic backgrounds. Indeed, many families are either from upper- and middle-class background while some are from lower social-economic set-ups (Africa Development Bank, 2011). Some families are educated to above college qualification whereas some have no qualifications. Communities like the Maasai, Turkana, and Samburu are quite traditional and hesitantly attend schools, like the ones discussed earlier who live nomadic lives. Even so, all these categories are diverse, and they can be found in rural areas

and urban areas. On the other hand, there are invisible and visible rules that control their settings, including in schools and classrooms (Bernstein, 2003). Such rules relating to family social and economic backgrounds.

The visible rules correlate to the social status and economic status of families, thus impacting the child's school enrolment and experiences. Parents with a good economic condition in Kenya enrol their children in private schools or highly equipped public schools where education standards are healthier (Extract 7). These parents are able to pay extra money for their children to be in those schools. For parents with low economic and social status, their purchasing power is low; thus, they take their children to poor schools which are at times underfunded. The different data sets reveal that physical spaces differed according to parental economic backgrounds. In my discussions of physical spaces it must be accepted that their differences meant that students had very different learning experiences. The differences were observed between Elimu and Baraka and discussed by teachers while differentiating private and public schools' practices.

Extract 7b

> **Kuria-** *so, parents who are more enlightened they employ more, some teachers are paid by the parents. But we have others who complain a lot and then they say no- one teacher one class you are enough. And people who are in the environment, some environment are considerate, they try to look for people, personnel who have gone to college and have not secure a job, then they employ about two or three. (Interview 2)*

Similarly, parental education attainments influence their attitudes towards education (Berk, 2013). In (Extract7b) above, Kuria claims that '*parents who are more enlightened'* are motivated to pay extra money for additional teachers

to help the workload. He argues that parent knowledge and understanding influence their willingness to support funding of resources in schools which in the end help to support better interaction spaces.

When I compare the schools in the study, Elimu was well equipped comparatively because it had a fully equipped library, good classrooms and the parents are from middle-class families. On the contrary, parents at Baraka school were from a lower economic status and the school was underfunded at the time of the study (see Photos Ai and Aii). As noted by Berk (2002), parents' education, household income, and family social class are inter-related, and they all impact their children's education.

Social-cultural and political hegemonies

It is important to note that there were several cultural, political, and global tensions and hegemonic power issues that impact Kenyan classroom practices. Although at times, these issues appeared to have no direct connection to the practice, they still had a significant impact. For example, as noted earlier, the curriculum in Kenya ignored students' cultural experiences such as community involvements and the use of local languages. The system seemed to have traces of colonial education which estranged the African culture. These colonial traces could have a massive impact on the students' social identity and participation in local and global platforms. Therefore, cultural pedagogies should be included in pedagogical spaces, since research has stressed on the benefits of having an education that relates to students' cultural backgrounds, including the use of multiple languages in learning (Thiong' o, 1986; UNESCO, 2015). Dialogic researchers (Alexander, 2008 and Mercer, 2008) seem to have overlooked how multilingualism can promote dialogue, which in this study could be significant for students in schools like Baraka.

The teachers' practices were informed through cultural understanding and their interactions with the social phenomena. The teachers at Baraka school understood the cultural background of their students. Consequently, they could relate to the students well. For example, they could use ethnic languages to emphasize specific points during their teaching. Nonetheless, at times, teachers savvy of their students' social backgrounds could encourage or hinder their interactions. Even so, this is not just apparent in Kenya, but it has been observable in other global circles where invisible and visible rules guide teacher practices (Bernstein, 2003; Gillborn, 2008; Diop, 2014).

From the analysis, there were significant invisible and visible power issues across different layers which shape classroom practices in Kenya. Bourdieu's social perspectives and Foucault's perspectives on social power (Hannus and Simola, 2016) were evident across the education system influence Kenyan teaching and learning. The local tensions permeated through social-cultural roles and perceptions, for example, how teachers and pupils related in their classrooms where there were authoritarian styles. Throughout the education system, a similar practice was evident, for example, the way the Ministry of Education and the government communicated with the teachers, it was top-down and rarely the other way around.

In the spaces for interactions, it is essential to have dialogues and cultivate platforms for continuous communication across various groups in Kenya, as agreed by teachers in this study. These discussions should include; teachers, parents, Ministry of Education, government, and pupils. These dialogues may help to air out issues that were overlooked. They would as well provide platforms for the 'silent groups' such as teachers, pupils, and parents from poor backgrounds. The government and the Ministry of Education as well may be

able to discuss their policies and initiatives in advance, which could ease tensions and endorse consultations.

Additionally, issues of inequality in funding could be addressed when all key groups participate, which would make them feel valued and included. Generally, if the Kenyan government and the Ministry of Education perpetuate the possibility for dialogues across various forums for all groups to engage in, in the local and country level, some of the tensions would be addressed. This will be a trajectory for democracy in the education system and governance. Moreover, the unison created in the country would mould strength and unanimity while confronting other local issues in politics, economy, and healthcare. Furthermore, teachers, parents, students, and all other key players would also participate in the global arenas and perhaps challenge domineering hegemonies.

From the data collection, it was evident that there was a disparity in the distribution of resources and maintenance of infrastructure in the physical spaces. The discrepancy was apparent when comparing Elimu and Baraka resources and infrastructures. Elimu school had parents from middle-class background had more resources such as a library, better classrooms, and more teachers and classrooms (Photo Aii). Baraka school which had parents from lower social-economic backgrounds had limited resources, which teachers acknowledged it limited their classroom practices (see Extract 2 and 5). The inequality was more of a class issue, where the lower social class are unable to access the best facilities, neither can they influence government distribution.

In policy spaces, there were issues of hierarchical order within the education system, and in the Kenyan government, which is predominantly authoritarian. For example, with teachers in this study, I distinguished that some of the changes in policies and practice such as corporal punishment and FGM

conflicted with some communities' social norms. Still, the ideals appeared to have been made into policies without much consultations with the communities creating tensions. For instance, in Extract 6, it was evident from the teachers statements the new outline of children's rights conflicted with cultural values of the society, creating a need for dialogue. The authoritarian style of governance gave minimal room for dialogue across the groups. Overall, it created tensions and disadvantaged classroom practices, impacting the confidence of students' in participation in local and global fields. As a result, there is an urgent need for neutral platforms for dialogues communication to address tensions and emancipates the disadvantaged groups. Moreover, it would help to promote social cohesion and create podiums for dialogue and progress education in Kenya. In areas that warrant development such as pedagogical reforms, policy changes, and curriculum. It would also help the government of Kenya and other interested parties (local and global) to outline their goals and then align them to the contextual needs. This would address global hegemonies and give a strong base for all key groups to participate locally and universally. Eventually, overcome domination, promoting dignity and autonomy for all.

For the majority of African countries (including Kenya), they must start discussing the dominance at local levels as well as at global levels. Guilherme (2016) posited that education is not fully democratic when universal hegemonic powers are being exercised every day. It is problematic when policies are drawn from global and continental bodies without consulting the people at the ground level such as parents, teachers, and students. The changes in policy and practice need to be debated and dialogued by all to help the education system to become more ethnocentric. The inclusion of children's voices and valuing of cultural context would increase autonomy of students in learning. It is important to promote freedom in education, as Mandela (1994) argued that education is a weapon for change. This change could start from the base by teachers using

diverse pedagogies and pedagogical spaces to improve their systems. Furthermore, teachers and other key players could raise their concerns on inequalities in their education system, in the society and the global platforms. By continuous involvement in dialogue, there might be social cohesion across all groups, and progressive plans could be inevitable.

In this paper, it is evident that social-cultural understanding of the context is imperative when developing and reviewing initiatives, policies, and practices in education systems. This should be done by providing platforms to all key players to dialogue in pedagogical spaces. For emancipation and social empowerment in education, there is a warranty to discuss issues of social inequalities and dictatorship within society and also in governments and global agencies. My stance is that dialogue across key groups within spaces available are the best way to overcome these concerns in education. Thereafter, societies can pave operational structures for development and further implement feasible pedagogical advancements that would improve the autonomy of students.

Conclusion

The study provides original and unique evidence of the reality of children in Kenya which is often overlooked. Contrast to the predominant global rhetoric which projects children in sub-Saharan Africa as neglected and deprived, the children in this study were healthy, cared for, and accessed free education. It was quite evident that safeguarding the welfare of children in Kenya was paramount, as demonstrated through policy registrations and government funding initiatives. Additionally, there were social support systems for students (children) from their families, teachers, and society as a whole. On the other hand, the students in this study had valuable social-cultural experiences and skills which they could bring into their classroom learning. However, the system of education in Kenya still has some gaps that need addressing in the

pedagogical spaces to enable autonomous engagement of the students in their learning. These gaps are; inequality in participation in policymaking, in curriculum development, in pedagogical choices, and funding allocation. The overlooking of critical groups in these development areas leads to tensions across the four pedagogical spaces.

Reduction of apparent tensions in pedagogical spaces (interaction, cultural, policy, and physical) is possible through the inclusion of cultural values and tools in education. As African scholars have argued, the inclusion of cultural practices, values, and the people's voices would make education more relevant to the lives of students and their world (Nyerere, 1974; Thiong'o, 1986; Njoya, 2017). Kenya being a signatory of international bodies that inform the kind of policies and pedagogical practices adopted in education is not complete. There is a need for the Ministry of Education to consult key players at the local levels such as students, teachers, and parents. These consultations could apply the dialogic approach that is culturally acceptable within the context. Tabulawa (2013) has argued that pedagogy development has failed in Africa for lack of consultation. Teachers in this study showed interest in adopting the dialogic approach across the education system. The dialogic practice could be beneficial in areas of policy change, resource funding, curriculum development, and while outlining pedagogy practice. Promotion of culturally acceptable dialogues would counteract the hegemonic barriers that are apparent in education. The move would promote the participation of the key players and increase the autonomy of students.

The lessons in this study could be applicable in other African countries which may still be haunted by colonial practices in their education systems. However, these lessons must be contextualised to suit respective settings. The findings of this study will be shared with teachers in Kenya and other key players in the

education system to help them advance practice and promote autonomy of their students.

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